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DEPARTMENT FOR AF A/S FRAZER, AF/SE NATSIOS AND AF/SPG, NSC
FOR PITTMAN AND SHORTLEY

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREF](#) [PHUM](#) [KPKO](#) [SU](#) [AU](#)

SUBJECT: ARAB POP STAR EVENT UNDERSCORES SUDANESE, ARAB
SCHIZOPHRENIA ON DARFUR

Classified By: CDA Alberto Fernandez, Reason: Section 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (U) Newly arrived CDA was invited at the last moment by the Libyan Ambassador to a late night concert/reception for Arab pop music stars who are performing in Sudan in solidarity with the suffering people of Darfur. The event included a concert by local Sudanese musicians (some from Darfur itself) in honor of the visiting artists, an awards ceremony for the participants and a charity art auction by local artists. The Rabat-based "private" pan-Arab National Council for Arab Culture organized the week-long tour which includes headliner Egyptian singer Sherine, Tunisian Mounira Hamdi (who received her award in a skin-tight white jumpsuit rarely seen in Sudan), Egyptian Hani Shakir, who announced his willingness to be a "voluntary ambassador for the sake of Darfur" among Arab artists and others.

¶2. (U) The event seemed very much a Libyan-run affair, with the Libyan Ambassador not only serving as master of ceremonies but very much directing the flow of events from behind the scenes. Several speakers noted that the National Council had declared 2007 the year of solidarity with Darfur and that they were seeking to raise enough funds to build 10 schools, 10 clinics and 50 wells in Darfur. The event, which was taped by both pan-Arab Al-Arabiyya and local Blue Nile Television Channel, seeks to raise awareness among Arab audiences about the suffering in Darfur. Local sponsors included Blue Nile TV, Aramex, Swissport, and the Rotana Hotel.

¶3. (U) In his remarks, the Libyan Ambassador tied Darfur to other causes of deep concern to Arabs) repeatedly mentioning "Iraq and Palestine and Lebanon and Darfur" as four equal cases of suffering demanding the solidarity of the region. He regularly repeated the typically Libyan mantra of Sudan's (and Darfur's) distinct Arab and African identity, "neither of which can be erased." While refraining from attacking the United States, he did take a swipe at the idea of UN forces on the ground, noting that "the much greater clash and struggle between the North and South in Sudan was solved through negotiations without the presence of UN peace keepers on the ground so why should this be needed in Darfur?"

¶4. (U) Aside from (mostly Arab) members of the diplomatic corps, it was a largely local Sudanese affair with several lesser Sudanese cabinet officials: the Ministers of Environment and of Culture giving it at least a tacit level of official approval by their presence. The initiative conclude with a concert by Sherine. According to news reports, some Sudanese Islamists have complained about the female singers performing in Khartoum but that seems to be a minor issue.

¶5. (C) Comment: The presence of the Sudanese ministers and

the remarks of the Libyan Ambassador underscore the surreal nature of such events. It is useful and quite laudatory to raise awareness of Darfur among Arab audiences. A recent Zogby poll commissioned by the Save Darfur Coalition demonstrated that, while highly suspicious of the West and its motives, Arab public opinion does care about the suffering in Darfur and wants to see it stop. But a casual observer would draw the conclusion from such an event and the public rhetoric surrounding it that the Khartoum regime is somehow an innocent bystander to this tragedy rather than a major reason for it. Increased awareness among Arab publics is good but it would be much better if it was coupled with an understanding of historic actions by the Sudanese Government (and other contributing players, like the Libyans) that made the ongoing tragedy in Darfur happen in the first place. It is ironic that the one major pan-Arab station covering the event, Al-Arabiyya, both produced and then buried a hard-hitting documentary on Darfur in 2005 which was never aired. End Comment.

FERNANDEZ